



## ROLE OF HINDU NATIONALISM AND ITS INFLUENCE ON INDIA'S POLITICAL CONDUCT

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### **Abstract**

*Indian nationalism may largely entail the essence of loyalty and allegiance towards the country as a nation regardless of caste, colour or religious differences while connotation of Hindu nationalism appears more specific, representing a specific religious community. Cultural, political and religious history and experiences define a national identity of the state. Hindu nationalism stemming from the belief of Hindu superiority is often used interchangeably with the concept of Indian nationalism. Indeed, genesis and philosophy of Hindu nationalism opened avenues for several politico-religious movements in the country resulting in taking central stage of India's politics. Hindu nationalist movements have remained an important contour of Hindu identity. In Indian political scenes, it marked its place in early 1990s followed by 2014 and 2019 general elections when BJP with its Hindutva leaning took the political stage. BJP's political conduct under the Modi era accentuate strong hold of Hindu nationalists in driving states' interaction at domestic and regional level specially with reference to Pakistan. Contrary to popular ideas of a secular Indian nationalism – mainly propagated by the father of Indian nation – Mohandas Gandhi and followed by Nehru, Sarvakar's ideology of Hindutva inculcated the idea of Hindu nationalism and superiority under*



*religious explanation by excluding other religious minorities of the subcontinent causing religious polarization in present India.*

**Key Words:** Hindutva, India, Politics, Rationalism, BJP, RSS.

## 1. Introduction

Hindu superiority remained an important feature among the Hindus of the subcontinent. The Hindu superiority complex coupled with religious intolerance invited communal riots in the subcontinent. This friction emerged due to repeated episodes of intolerant behavior of Hindu extremists towards Muslims of the subcontinent. An upsurge in occurrence and severity of such communal riots resulted in separation of two nations of subcontinent to be independent states; India and Pakistan. Undeniably, religious ideology of both Hindus and Muslims became central rationale for the partition. Divided on basis of politico-religious differences, the ideological friction between the states continued to affect their bilateral relations. Even before partition right wing Hindu nationalists through their religious factions such as the *Sangh Parivar*, *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS) and the *Vishva Hindu Parishad* (VHP) continued to influence the political activities of the subcontinent. Hindu nationalists endorsed the Hindutva ideology based on the idea of Hindu superiority and subjugation of religious minorities of the subcontinent. Indeed, India's leading political party Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is a byproduct of Hindu extremists' factions. Hindutva has played a pivotal role in the evolution of BJP's ideology based politics.

Generally, the terms of *Hindu nationalism*, *Indian nationalism* and *Hindutva* are used interchangeably; however, among all three concepts with some overlapping, the distinction does prevail. Largely, ideology is a basic contour of any political party, may be political, social or religious in orientation. In the case of the BJP, *Hindutva* served as the main ideology to gain strength from like-minded Hindu nationalist factions such as the *Sangh Parivar*, *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS) and the *Vishva Hindu Parishad* (VHP).

Formation of the RSS was the initial incarnation of Hindu ideology with a political agenda. To an extent, the ideology of Hindu nationalism rejected the Congress' version of Indian nationalism and provided impetus to Muslim separatism and eventual creation of Pakistan (Jaffrelot, 2007). In the 1990s, with the advent of the BJP taking majority seats in general election, Hindu nationalists' ideology became noticeable in the political scenes of the country. Nevertheless, Hindu nationalist movements have remained an important contour of Hindu identity and known to the general public. In Indian political scenes, it was witnessed in early 1990s and 2014 elections when BJP with its allegiance to Hindutva

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ideology took the political stage. Indeed, 2014 success of the BJP, constituting Narendra Modi as Indian Prime Minister was widely anticipated as resumption of Hindutva ideology in Indian politics.

This paper offers an understanding of Modi's political ideology in relation to Hindu nationalism and India's dealing with minorities in India and with Pakistan in particular. This study attempts to examine and describe how Hindu nationalism evolved and its political dominion was received internationally, especially in relation to Indian foreign policy conduct toward Pakistan. Taken together, it will explain the origin and role of Hindu nationalism and associated right-wing organizations in defining Indian political behavior.

## **2. Defining the Role of Ideology and Hindu Nationalism in India**

Generally, it is hard to confine the term ideology in a specific frame of explanation as it is used in different cases with different connotations and interpretation. More commonly, ideology refers to a set of ideas, stemming from a thought process consisting of principles and associated beliefs as to provide an individual or the state with a defined clear plan of action and determining their demeanor. Ideology is one of the elusive elements of national power and serves as a foundation, and often, a tool of unity in the domestic settings, having influence in international politics. Politico-religious ideologies, based on a certain belief and value system, when they take center stage of politics have greater potential to influence states' domestic and foreign policy conduct (Freeden, February 2006). While nationalism or national identity, continues to evolve and rearrange under certain situations the respective state experiences. Nationalism, being the cornerstone of a state's foreign policy, is often forwarded in political discourse wherein states use it as a tool for certain interests (Bhatt, 2006).

Understanding Hindu nationalism is imperative to broadly comprehend Indian political discourse. Nationalism, generally referred to as a sense of loyalty and patriotism towards one country, is a shared sentiment present in every nation. The national identity and nationalism are often interchangeably used. In India, two types of nationalism are prevalent and are thus different, Indian nationalism and Hindu nationalism. As Indian nationalism may largely entail the essence of loyalty and allegiance towards the country as a nation regardless of caste, color or religious differences while connotation of Hindu nationalism appears more specific, representing a specific religious community. Hence, both shades of nationalism stand separate.

Nevertheless, national identity and politico-religious identity of India remains pertinent features for analyzing the role of Hindu nationalism in Indian foreign policy

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generally and towards Pakistan in specific. As preservation of politico-religious identity and ideology provided the foundational grounds for separation of two nations of the subcontinent. Understanding the process of nation building is fundamental to understanding the polity of the state. Hence, two factors; identity and ideology will be examined and explained in this paper.

Historical account on India, as a country, suggests being engrossed with aspects of religious identity, ideology, strategic culture and domestic politics. In order to deliberate on Hindu nationalism, it is important to understand its evolution and origin. Anthony D. Smith, professor of nationalism and ethnicity at London School of Economics, presented a detailed account on importance, evolution and role of identity in state's behavior. He examined the origin and formation of nations and national identity as how these are formed and influences the state affairs. According to Smith, in early ages, the phenomenon of identity goes back to ethnic or tribal association which later transforms into ethnic and cultural identity of people or groups (Smith, 1991). To him, ethnicity of a nation is an important factor that binds people into a nation and establishes a strong sense of nationalism (Smith A. , 1998). Taken together, this provides the foundation for national identity construction. National identity is composed of various elements and beliefs shared by a group. Defined identity of any nation is aimed at cultivating elements of nation building, unity and homogeneity among its people. Based upon the leading ethnicity of the state, the national identity construction involves building and diffusing a certain portrait of the nation (Guibernau, 2004).

John Breuilly, professor of nationalism and ethnicity at the London School of Economics, associates the concept of nationalism with political movement, wherein the notion of nationalism is employed as a pretext to implement or vindicate certain actions driven by political agendas (Smith A. , 1998). Breuilly's account on nationalism seems more confined to political explanation of the concept while minimizing the role and connotation of other elements such as ideology, religious association, ethnic or cultural influences etc.

It may be argued that owing to its powerful characteristic of uniting people, nationalism creates a platform to mitigate differences among people. Further, through or under the pretext of nationalism, states are often able to execute social mobilization, dogmatic management and legitimization of their actions more efficiently (Smith A. , 1998). In the context of India, it is argued that the country faces two variants of nationalism, Indian nationalism and Hindu nationalism which may stand different in terms of orientation but at times influences the other at time of execution. For instance, Indian nationalism may refer to general sense of patriotism and unity among its people

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irrespective of caste, creed, religious or ethnic discrimination. While Hindu nationalism broadly denotes or gives an impression of representing philosophy of people belonging to specific (Hindu) belief systems, identity, culture and religion.

Unfolding national identity, involves offering explanations of various associated dimensions such as cultural, political and religious identities to comprehend to what extent this framework constructs and describes national identity and Hindu nationalism in India.

### **3. Origin of Hindu Nationalism in the Subcontinent**

Historical experiences and interaction of the state, plays a vital role in defining and advancing its national security and foreign policy behavior. An examination into Indian history reveals that the sense of Hindu superiority had always existed among Hindus of the subcontinent. It was not only present during the Muslim rule but also prevailed during the British era. Though, as an impact of foreign rule of the country, the British rule led to the political unification of all religious groups of the subcontinent including Hindus and Muslims. Historically, cultural and spiritual superiority of ancient Hindu civilization demonstrated by the ethnic group – Aryan – generally referred as the noble Hindu class, decisively contributed to a sense of primacy among Hindus (Thapar, 1996). Since then this racial cum religious pride fortified the sense of Hindu nationalism and Hindu superiority and this legacy remained an important feature of present India.

On religious grounds, the Hindu nationalism encountered challenges from competing systems such as Judaism and Buddhism (Levy, 1967). Hindu's superior caste, Brahmins held paramount position in articulating Hindu nationalistic approach. Over the period, various religions and cultures flourished in the subcontinent mainly Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and other belief systems. Nevertheless, two major religious groups, composed of Hindus and Muslims dominated the geopolitical landscape. Before partition, Hindu-Muslim religious and cultural differences not only led to several clashes but also provided the reason to the Muslims of the subcontinent to seek independent homeland. Indeed, India's growing stress on Hinduism further aggravated the embryonic resentment between Hindus and Muslims resulting in creation of Muslim's own political party the Muslim League in 1906 (Levy, 1967). Upon establishing an independent political party, Muslims emphasized an independent state. Furthermore, Hindu-Muslim split remained the major reason of discord even after establishment of Pakistan as an independent state.

Tensions and uprisings between Hindus and Muslims troubled the political landscape in the wake of India and Pakistan separation. By 1947, Muslim majority, under the leadership of M. Ali Jinnah founded the new homeland, Pakistan. However, the

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partition phase remained violent on racial and religious grounds that even after partition, riots continued between Hindu and Muslim in India. Such tensions, stemming from religious and racial differences, continued to erupt intermittently and challenged the acclaimed secularist orientation of India as a state. Namely, Hindu nationalist movements led by organizations such as RSS and VHP gained more political influence in India. In order to create an impact in the domestic politics and policy, Hindu nationalist organizations formed Bharatiya Jana Sangh Party (BJS), later succeeded by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

The legacy of Hindu superiority stemming from religious and cultural grounds largely shaped Indian political thought toward Pakistan. The ideology of Hindu nationalism suggested India's national identity to be led by the central belief system, Hinduism. The concept of Hindu nationalism dates back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, however, later in practice, it surfaced as a concrete politico-religious movement, manifested through RSS (Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism a Reader*, 2007).

#### **4. Evolution of Hindu Nationalist Ideology and Pakistan**

India and Pakistan relations have largely been hostage to unrelenting crisis-like situations, emanating from religious and political extremism. Even pre-partition time was marked with Hindu-Muslim communal tensions. The partition of India in 1947 did not only bring independence to Pakistan and India but also crystallized the underlying politico-religious ideological dimensions. Notwithstanding the fact, existing together both entities of the subcontinent could never merge together rather maintained their religious and cultural identities separate. The distinctive religious beliefs of Hindu and Muslim always remained the separate identity of the both communities.

Despite living together, communal violence on the basis of distinct religion and culture remained ubiquitous. Thus, it cultivated social and political consciousness among the Muslim community that further reinforced the idea of Muslims being a separate identity. Socio-political discriminating and physical violence against the Muslim community waged through Hindu extremists' groups continued through the history. The rift stemming from ideological friction provided the Muslim community of the subcontinent with justification to rise for their independent piece of land to retain their identity.

Differences of ideology engrossed deep in some hardliners of both countries not only remained present before the partition period but still continues to persist. Thus, ideologies motivated by hard-liners' dictums against the other are shrinking the space for betterment

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through ingraining the continued suspicion and negative mindset against each other (Khan, 2012).

A brief analysis of dynamics associated with nationalist and religious ideologies, prevailing in India provides the basic framework to ascertain role and influence of Hindu nationalistic orientation in shaping its relations with Pakistan. Narendra Modi comes from the BJP, a political party which largely espouses the viewpoint of Hindu nationalism and Hindutva. To understand the BJP's political conduct under the Modi era, it is essential to understand and discuss the genesis and philosophy of Hindu nationalism that connotes several politico-religious movements in India.

#### **4.1. Hindutva**

Origins of Hindu nationalism, carrying some element of extremism, date back to pre-partition era of British rule in the Indian Subcontinent. It was around 1923, when Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, Indian Hindu writer and pro-independence activist, introduced the terminology of "Hindutva" with central idea of "Hindu nationalism" (Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism A Reader*, 2007). The core concept of Hindutva focused around exclusive superiority and domination of Hindu nation based on the essence of Hinduism. Savarkar's philosophy of Hindutva did not rule out the possibility of military means rather offered justification for aggression and militarism in order to defend and promote the "Hindu nation". Being President of the Hindu political party "Hindu Mahasabha" and father of the Hindutva concept, Savarkar presented three clear requirements for being Hindutva first; "to be Hindu by paternal descent, having a racial bond and a common civilization" (Katju, 2011). Additionally, M. S. Golwalkar – a follower of Savarkar – further elaborated his concept of "Nation" as the "Hindu Nation" only (Golwalkar, 1939).

Evidently, this description cum criteria excluded other communities of the subcontinent such as Muslims, Christians, Sikhs etc from the purview of Hindutva concept and thus making it exclusively Hindu-centric thought. The Hindutva ideology provided the platform to Indian strategic calculations whereby indoctrination of Hindu being the superior nation sowed the seed of marginalizing other communities. Under the banner of Hindutva ideology, a vast majority of Hindu started believing themselves as sole title-holders of Hindustan [India] are found practicing the policy of subjugation against other communities in India.

Contrary to the popular idea of a secular Indian nationalism – mainly propagated by the father of Indian nation – Mohandas Gandhi, Savarkar's ideology of Hindutva



inculcated the idea of Hindu nationalism under religious explanation by excluding other religious communities of the subcontinent.

Though India was formed and accepted the principle of secularism however, presently, Hindu nationalism appears to possess deep roots and exercising influence in the Indian political system, evident through growing intolerance among the Hindu nationalist of India. The ideology of Hindu nationalism gained significant increase and criticism during the 1990s, when extremist Hindu nationalist demolished the Babri Mosque. The Hindu narrative forwarded on that account mainly professed the idea that it was King Babur who demolished the Hindu temple and built the mosque (Aoun, July 2012). Subsequently, “the Hindu right” has become a strong technique of identity more than a religion only (Kinnvall, 2010).

Similar religious intolerance was witnessed in the recent past over the meat controversy in India. Wherein Muslim community of India was clearly banned to use beef further an Indian Muslim was beaten to death by a Hindu horde who assumed he had taken a cow (Mogul, 2015). Rather RSS leader Indresh Kumar asked the Muslims of India to “stop eating beef and adopt cows” (RSS asks Muslim..., 2017). Further in the wake of growing mistreatment to Muslims community of India, the leader of another Hindu radical organization Shiv Sena stated “If the Muslim community in India want any special treatment as Muslims, they should go to Pakistan” (If Muslim want..., 2015). Taken together, in the larger realm of affairs, Hindutva ideology may intensify current fault lines in the so called secular India, since it pursues superiority of Hindus and marginalization of minorities in India.

Hindutva ideology does not limit it; rather over the period of time, it has gained roots in the Indian system where reflection of Hindutva’s teaching can clearly be witnessed. By and large, the ideology of Hindutva serves the purpose of guidelines to India’s leading politico-religious organizations such as RSS, the BJP or Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP); indeed such organizations and groups are interwoven. An alternative perspective suggests Hindutva as reaction to “Caliphate Movement” driven by Islamic ideology that Savarkar thought derives from his deep-rooted hostility to Islam and its followers. Savarkar’s ideology of Hindutva was further pursued by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar who founded the RSS in Nagpur (Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism a Reader*, 2007).

#### **4.2. Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)**

The RSS was established in 1925 to reinforce “Hindu cultural identity” and as a “self-defense force” to defend Hindus. With the guidelines of Hindutva, RSS emerged to

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be a social organization for Hindus. After K.B. Hedgewar, M.S. Golwalkar, became head of RSS in 1940 (The BJP: chauvinists or pragmatists? Hindu Nationalism and India's Muslims, 1998). Golwalkar forwarded the legacy of Savarkar and further presented a radical side of RSS by drawing an analogy between Hindu-Muslim of the subcontinent with Hitler and Jews. The RSS teaching consisted of indoctrination of Hindutva ideology dictating religious and racial superiority.

He emphasized *“if we Hindus grow stronger, in time these Muslim friends of the League type will have to play the part of German Jews”* (Mukherjee, 2008). As part of the policy, he further asserted that *“the non-Hindu ... must adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and revere Hindu religion... Or [they] may stay in the country wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges”* (Chandhoke, 2009). Thereby the RSS intensified the Hindutva dictum by excluding Muslims and Christians from the ambit of Indian citizenship and associated socio-political and religious rights.

Based on such thoughts, RSS continued its agenda and role even post the British era. After independence in 1947, RSS members played their vital role in forming a political party, Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) in 1951. After the dissolution of RSS's first Indian political party Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came on the surface to forward Hindu nationalists' thought under RSS banner in 1980.

Presently the ruling party in India, the BJP is the successor of BJS. The BJP, commonly referred as “political arm” of the RSS, was indeed created by members of the RSS (Aoun, July 2012). The RSS is generally known for having close links to the currently ruling government of India – the BJP. Based on such teachings, various noticeable political figures of the BJP have been formally part of this faction of RSS namely the PM Vajpayee, Modi and Lal Krishan Advani (Aoun, July 2012).

RSS and the VHP have remained against the secular identity of India propagated by the Congress rather insisted for the "religious consciousness" of the Hindu majority (Narayanan, 2010). Babari mosque episode followed by massive killings of Muslim in India provided Hindutva politics with an opportunity to increase its social and religious foundations across India. Later BJP coming into power allowed the RSS and its associated groups to gain access to the States' institutions thus challenging the Indian secularism identity (Editorial, 2010).

Still, despite chanting the slogan of secularism and tolerance, the party- BJP- remains closely associated with the Hindu nationalist faction of RSS. To serve the

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objective of RSS and its leaning towards the core idea of Hindutva, a vast section of Hindu community in India has systematically been 'hegemonizing' and propagating the Hindutva dictums through inducing strong regional and cultural variances among other minorities (Apoorvanand, 2017).

Under these settings, RSS has long been accused for staging violence against Muslim, signifying its anti-Muslim and anti-Pakistan rhetoric. The infamous Gujarat massacre against the Muslims took place during Modi's term as the Chief Minister of the State in 2002 (Ganguly, 2015). Moreover, RSS-backed politicians have largely demonstrated an anti-Pakistan approach and have from time to time opposed improved diplomatic ties and peaceful resolution of outstanding issues with Pakistan.

#### **4.3. Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP)**

Erstwhile members of the RSS Swami Chinmayananda and Shivram Shankar created another Hindu extremist faction out of the RSS in 1964 and named it "Vishva Hindu Parishad" (VHP), having a relatively more hardliner approach towards other religions. The VHP having military orientation through its youth wing "Bajrang Dal" professes the idea of being "warriors of the Hindutva revolution" (Aoun, July 2012). Based on RSS ideology, VHP attempted to unify Hindus. Thus, by harnessing religious grounds for political reasons VHP being an organization, widely reached out to various parts of the country to mobilize masses. In doing so, VHP continued its welfare work by establishing temples and schools while reaching out to masses through organizational social activities (Hansen, 1999). Reference to Pakistan, like other such factions within India, VHP also gives venomous statements against Pakistan. In the recent past, various extremist and militant wings of such factions in India demonstrated hate speech against Pakistan. VHP's leading figure Bansal asserted that "time has come to smash the head of Pakistan, otherwise such incidents will continue to happen" (Time has come..., 2017). Even in dealing with Pakistan, such outfits discourage the stakeholders from making any step forward rather toe the anti-Pakistan approach forcefully.

#### **4.4. Akhand Bharat**

Parallel to the strong dogma of Hindutva, it is equally imperative to understand how India as a country views its neighbors, specifically Pakistan in its foreign policy calculations. The geo-Political dimension of Hindutva may also be examined. Another important part of the idea of the geopolitics of Hindutva is Akhand Bharat implying 'undivided India'. Undoubtedly, soon after independence of Pakistan, a vast majority of Hindus influenced from the teachings of above discussed radical ideologies, did not accept Pakistan as an

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independent and sovereign state which was, despite all efforts, carved out from the clutches of Hindu majority.

Till today, radical Hindu continue to believe in the dream of Akhand Baharat, envisioning Pakistan coming back to join India. Though conventional wisdom does not accept radical Hindu's ideology rather negates the chances of such a possibility. Ram Madhav, the BJP General Secretary, on a TV interview to Al Jazeera acknowledged the existence and association of BJP-RSS with the conviction to create Akhand Bharat which still believes in reunion of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh (Ram Madhav on...2016, 2016).

### **5. Influence of Hindu Nationalist approach on India-Pakistan Relations**

Since independence, being the first Prime Minister of India, Nehru provided the country with a basic framework of interaction with the world. Nehru promoted the idea of secularism and democracy. Irrefutably, Hindu-Muslim communal riots are not a new phenomenon and was present even pre-partition time however, occurrence of such incidents was communal unrests was comparatively low. Nehru, being the first leader of the nation, opposed the idea of using ethno-religious fault lines (Jafferlot, 2019).

An examination of Indian political conduct from Nehru to Modi informs a fundamental difference of approach and ambitions. Nehru's legacy was marked with a purpose to unite and strengthen India through secularism and socialism while Modi's disposition is to unify Hindutva dictum. Through powerful appeal to nationalism and Hindu pride, BJP's election win in 2014 indicates India's renovation into a Hindu state. By reelecting Modi, India's credence to secularism is largely questioned. To proponents of secularism, Modi's victory in the polls is basically a win for the ideology he personifies.

In 2014, the BJP took the office again with a clear majority in parliament. PM Modi, having his roots in the RSS with a staunch pro-Hindu agenda, signaled influences on Indian foreign policy. Several incidents of religious intolerance, derogatory remarks with regard to Muslims and Pakistan, by so called Hindu nationalists leaders/ organizations demonstrated a clear departure from much acclaimed identity of secular India. During the Modi era, rise of Hindu nationalism was witnessed ranging from killing of Muslims upon eating cow's meat to canceling visas to Pakistani artists. On the diplomatic front, the pressure of Hindu nationalists often led to disruption of bilateral engagements between Islamabad and New Delhi.

In the Indian political landscape, the right-wing Hindu nationalists under the BJP's umbrella have struggled to subside Congress' popularity and approach to secular politics in

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the country. During the 1970s Congress remained as the major political party of the country and in order to decrease its influence and political hold among Indian masses, right-wing Hindu nationalists created the BJS successor political party, the BJP. Nevertheless, religious extremism on account of Hindu nationalist was widely witnessed in December 1992 when Muslims' worship place, the Babri Masjid was obliterated by extremist Hindu followed by violence against Muslims in Gujarat under the government of Narendra Modi as Chief Minister of the state. Ironically, these episodes are celebrated by Hindu nationalists as pride and dubbed as sign 'awakened Hindu nation'. Hindutva followers celebrate the anniversary of the Gujarat incident as "*Shaurya Diwas*" ("Valor Day") (Anand, 2011).

Under Vajpayee the BJP largely focused on political strands of nationalism, integration and democracy at the domestic political level and largely interpreted as 'positive secularism' (Bhatt, 2006). The BJP continued the legacy of Hindu nationalist ideology and notably gained power in 1998 and later in 2014 general elections of India. During election campaigns, BJP manifested the Hindutva ideology and argued to pose a serious challenge to secular and democratic values of the constitution of the country (Bhatt, 2006).

Nevertheless, the BJP tenure of 1998 is largely viewed as slightly moderate, if not absolutely, in comparison to widely-anticipated political behavior of India, led by Hindu nationalists' ideology both at domestic and international front. Different explanations may be forwarded for such a behavior as by then, BJP came into center with the support of coalition the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) thus, it could not exercise or implement its nationalist approach substantially and had to readjust its policies considering political diversity in the country.

After the victory of the BJP in the 16th Lok Sabha elections followed by Narendra Modi's taking charge as Prime Minister of India in 2014, India – Pakistan relations have largely been marked with the combination of political and diplomatic breakthroughs and breakdowns. PM Modi, contrary to his election campaign's rhetoric, made few positive gestures towards Pakistan such as inviting the then PM Nawaz Sharif for his swearing-in ceremony and the same equally received welcome response from Pakistan's side ensuing in a conducive environment.

However, later, shades of Hindu nationalists' ideology were witnessed at large scale not only on the Indian domestic political system but also towards Pakistan in specific. Indeed, the anti-Pakistan rhetoric remained an important element to steer and at times affect diplomatic relations between two sides during Modi's era. Previously, tensions

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between the two sides have remained high, most tangibly resulting in cancellation of foreign secretary-level talks, security advisers' dialogue, and New Delhi's refusal to participate in the SAARC Summit scheduled to be held in Islamabad. In addition to unfortunate episodes of terrorist attack such as Pathankot, Uri incident marked by shooting down of Indian fighter jet, violating Pakistan's air space ignited the strategic environment of both sides. During all such events, anti-Pakistan rhetoric from the right-wing Hindu nationalists remained dynamic and influenced Indian foreign policy towards Pakistan.

Since the 1990s, India has been pursuing economic reforms and have made gradual economic upsurge due to change of policies of respective governments. In 2014, economic progress was the central theme of Modi's election campaign to appeal to voters' minds while modulating Hindu nationalists' communal prejudice against Muslims. The BJP election Manifesto for 2014 was carefully worded without explicit mentioning of Pakistan. Nevertheless, anti-Pakistan rhetoric remained one of the themes for Hindu nationalists during the campaign calling for tough foreign policy against Pakistan (India's Modi pledges..., 2013). Subramaniam Swamy, the BJP leader had openly threatened Pakistan to be broken into four pieces (Ali, 2017). Hindu nationalists have always exploited anti-Pakistan sentiment for political reasons. During 2002 elections, Modi's supporters – the BJP's – workers chanted the slogan if Modi is not voted it will be considered as betrayal to the nation by favoring Pakistan (Jabr, 2018). Nevertheless, examination of Modi's tenure from 2014 to present reflects the strong hold of Hindu nationalists in steering India domestic and foreign dealings. Taken together, India's dealing with Pakistan specially during Modi's tenure, reflects strong influence of Hindu nationalism on Indian political discourse of secular India.

## **6. Conclusion**

Over the years, Hindu nationalism based on the ideational force of Hindu superiority has gained an important position to steer India's interaction and conduct both at domestic and regional level. On ideological grounds at the domestic level, the BJP seems like moderating its approach on Hindutva ideology primarily for the sake of attracting voters; however, on international level, policies concerning Pakistan prove to be continuation of the legacy - anti-Pakistan rhetoric. At the domestic level, protests against Hindu extremists denote that the ideological predisposition of the BJP like factions cannot alone serve the purpose. Nonetheless, analysis of the existing literature illustrates how religion and politics are intervened in India. As discussed in this study, the role of Hindu nationalism and the ideology of Hindutva appears to have instilled in the Indian political thought to an extent that organizational network of right-wing Hindu nationalists, the



*Sangh Parivar*, remained in domestic politics and influenced the foreign policy behavior of the country towards Pakistan in particular.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to draw distinction between political and religious aspects of political parties and their associated organizations primarily owing to exploitation of religious explanations for political motives. However, representation of Hindu nationalists' political thought; the RSS, VHP etc demonstrates the organizational strength of the *Sangh Parivar*. Over the period, the Hindu nationalists' ideology has successfully translated into political, and to an extent, national identity, if not absolutely. It is argued that the very ideology of Hindu nationalism or Hindutva, despite its strong hold and influence in the country, still faces challenges to be regarded as national identity as a whole, as in parallel, the concept of Indian nationalism prevails equally. However, with regard to Indian foreign policy behavior and conduct with Pakistan, role of and influence of politico-religious ideological fraction remains to be one of the factors influencing the dynamics of bilateral relations.

Hindu nationalist movements have remained a significant contour of Hindu identity even during the pre-partition era. During that time religious, cultural and ethnic fault lines were exploited by right-wing Hindus by indoctrinating a sense of purity, superiority among Hindu nationalists of the Subcontinent while discriminating other religious ethnic minorities; Muslims, Christians etc. In this regard, Hindu nationalists' ideology of Hindutva and creation of organizations such as RSS, under the umbrella of *Sangh Parivar* took strength in mobilizing the Hindus in domestic politics. Later after partition, the rise of Hindu nationalists' ideology in the Indian political stage was seen in the 1990s, 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections when the BJP with its dedication to the ideology of Hindutva took the political stage. Taken together, it is concluded that under Modi's leadership, right wing Hindu nationalist have challenged the secular and democratic identity of India at large.



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